

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY PARIS
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C O N F I D E N T I A L USUN NEW YORK 03366

EXDIS

E.O.11652:GDS
TAGS: PINT, LE, FR
SUBJECT: FRENCH CONDITIONS FOR RENEWAL OF UNIFIL

REF: PARIS 28489

1. WE REMAIN PERPLEXED BY THE QUAI'S REASONING IN FAVOR OF DELIBERATE AMBIGUITY REGARDING ITS DECISION TO CONTINUE ITS PARTICIPATION IN UNIFIL. WE NOTE THAT IN AMBASSADOR HARTMAN'S LAST DISCUSSION WITH SOUTOU (REFTEL) THE LATTER INDICATED THAT FRENCH MOTIVATION WAS TO PUT "MAXIMUM PRESSURE" ON LEBANON AND ISRAEL BY INDICATING THAT THEY CANNOT COUNT INDEFINITELY ON THE FRENCH CONTINGENT.
2. FROM THE REPORTING WHICH WE HAVE RECEIVED FROM EMBASSY PARIS AND OTHER POSTS WE HAVE SEEN NO INDICATION THAT THE FRENCH SO FAR HAVE TOLD ANYONE BUT OURSELVES THAT THEY ARE CONTIMPLATING A REDUCTION IN EITHER THE DURATION OF THE
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MANDATE AND/OR THE SIZE OF THEIR CONTINGENT. WE WOULD BE INTERESTED TO LEARN IF ANY ADDRESSEE KNOWS WHETHER FRENCH HAVE ACTUALLY GIVEN SUCH INDICATION OT LEBANON OR ISRAEL. IF THEY HAVE NOT DONE SO, WHAT IS EMBASSY PARIS' ASSESSMENT OF THE POSSIBLE TIMING OF SUCH A FRENCH MOVE?

3. WE WOULD,OF COURSE, BE GLAD TO HAVE THE FRENCH JOIN

US IN ENCOURAGING BOTH LEBANESE AND ISRAELIS TO FACILITATE FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIFIL'S MANDATE, BUT WE VERY MUCH DOUBT THAT THE LEBANESE OR THE ISRAELIS WOULD BE GREATLY AFFECTED IN THEIR ACTIONS REGARDING SOUTHERN LEBANON BY THIS SORT OF VEILED FRENCH THREAT. AS REPORTING OVER THE LAST MONTH HAS ELOQUENTLY DEMONSTRATED, THE LEBANESE FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS CANNOT BRING THEMSELVES TO IMPLEMENT ANY OF THE PROPOSALS TO MOVE AN LAF BATTALION TO TIBNIN OR ELSEWHERE IN THE SOUTH. WE VERY MUCH DOUBT THAT FRENCH AMBIGUITY REGARDING THE RENEWAL OF THEIR PARTICIPATION IN UNIFIL WOULD HAVE MUCH IMPACT ON THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT IN THIS REGARD. THE ISRAELIS FOR THEIR PART HAVE MADE IT ABUNDANTLY CLEAR THAT, WHATEVER GRUDGING SUPPORT THEY NOW EXTEND TO UNIFIL, THEY ARE NOT COUNTING ON IT TO MAINTAIN THE SECURITY OF THEIR NORTHERN BORDER. THEY HAVE EXPLICITLY SAID THAT IF THEY HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN THE CHRISTIAN MILITIA AND UNIFIL, THEY WOULD OPT FOR THE FORMER. WE DOUBT THAT FRENCH "PRESSURE", PARTICULARLY IN THIS AMBIGUOUS FORM, WILL LEAD TO ISRAELI "MODERATION".

4. ON THE OTHER HAND, FRENCH AMBIGUITY SEEMS TO US LIKELY TO HAVE QUITE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES IN NEW YORK. IT COULD WELL LEAD OTHER TROOP CONTRIBUTORS TO BEGIN TO RECONSIDER THEIR OWN POSITIONS ON THE UNIFIL MANDATE. THE ARABS MIGHT WELL SIMPLY CONCLUDE THAT THE FRENCH WANTED OUT OF UNIFIL AND THAT THE FORCE ITSELF WOULD SOON BE

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WITHDRAWN. GOVERNMENTS SUCH AS SENEGAL AND NIGERIA, WHOSE UN MISSIONS TEND TO BE VERY PRO-ARAB, COULD FEEL IMPELLED TO ACT UPON THE PREDICTABLE ARAB CHARGE THAT UNIFIL HAS OPERATED IN AN "UNBALANCED" WAY TO CURB PALESTINIANS AND PROTECT THE CHRISTIAN/ISRAELI SECURITY ZONE NORTH OF ISRAEL'S BORDER WITH LEBANON. NONE OF THIS WILL HELP US OR THE UN IN OUR EFFORTS REGARDING SOUTHERN LEBANON. WE WOULD BE INTERESTED IN ADDRESSEE'S COMMENTS.

5. TO THE EXTENT THAT THE FRENCH ARE ACTUALLY CONTEMPLATING (RATHER THAN JUST THREATENING) ANY SIGNIFICANT REDUCTION IN THEIR CONTINGENT, OR LIMITING THE UNIFIL RENEWAL TO THREE MONTHS, WE AGAIN WOULD LIKE TO REGISTER OUR CONCERN. THE FRENCH CONTINGENT IS NOT ONLY ONE OF THE MOST PROFESSIONAL AND WELL-TRAINED IN UNIFIL, BUT ALSO PLAYS A VITAL LOGISTICS ROLE. ANY SIGNIFICANT REDUCTION IN ITS SIZE IS BOUND TO WEAKEN THE FORCE MEASURABLY. AS TO THE MANDATE, A THREE-MONTH MANDATE IS UNDESIRABLE FOR ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL REASONS. MOREOVER, A FURTHER SC DEBATE ON UNIFIL IN MID-DECEMBER IS NOT LIKELY TO BE HELPFUL EITHER FOR LEBANON OR FOR OUR LARGER MIDDLE EAST INTERESTS, ESPECIALLY GIVEN THE LIKELIHOOD THAT DEBATES

AND RESOLUTIONS IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY COULD CAUSE
ADDITIONAL STRAINS IN THE RELATIONS AMONG THE VARIOUS
PARTIES AND OURSELVES. WE HOPE THE FRENCH CAN BE
DISSUADED FROM CALLING FOR A THREE-MONTH LIMIT ON UNIFIL'S
EXTENSION IF THEY ARE SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING
SUCH A POSITION. LEONARD

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